No. 50

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"I haven't time to talk to you," Alice spoke again in a tone of anger when she saw her husband's obvious disinclination to comply with her request.

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

PROPRIETY and a certain degree of pride forbid the raising of objections. Phil did not want to be regarded as an old crab, and so he played along for a while as best he could. Although he was loath to admit it, he would have welcomed an opportunity to get something on Alice. They could not go on definitely living together as they were.

Already gossips were busy disecting their domestic difficulties. A certain group of men, members of the Madison Country Club, with whom Alice stood in high favor, had begun to look upon him as a sort of social dead-head.

There was a time when he had enough evidence to apply for a divorce. But existing conditions made use of the evidence impossible.

And so Phil spent all of his time taking care of his business, his children, and dreaming about that woman he had loved and lost. Hope still dwelled in his unhappy heart.

He felt quite sure that sooner or later Marie must be found. And when that day came, he wanted to be ready to take her in his arms, not only as his wife, but also as the mistress of Oak Manor.

A woman of Alice's characteristics was bound to commit indiscretions. Already she had several admirers who openly competed for her smiles.

What the eventual outcome of this would be, lay still in the lap of the gods. And so Gordon had to be content to watch and wait.

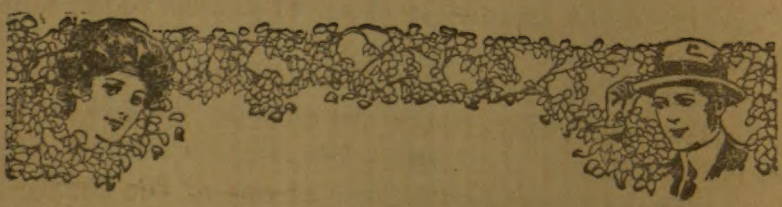
Every morning at the same hour he rose, spent an hour with the children, then drove to his Chicago office.

When he came home earlier than usual and found Alice entertaining guests for tea, he greeted them cordially and asked to be excused.

His evening hours were devoted to telling fairy

stories to Harry and Phyllis. But here all was not pleasure, for both of the children constantly insisted upon knowing when Miss Desmond was coming back.

"She'll be back soon," he would say, hiding the ache in his heart behind a smile. "She'll be back soon. Just be patient."



Chapter 162

THE UGLY TRUTH.

GORDON always had luncheon at the club where he met quite a few of his old friends. It offered him the mental diversion he needed. Nothing heartens a man of depressed spirit more than a vigorous slap on the back and a strong grip of the hand. Phil got that frequently from men who had not seen him for a while.

Their good-natured banter about having been in retirement on his country estate he accepted with a smile. But he quickly resented any allusion to his marital troubles.

One of his cronies, a chum of college days, took particular pains to lift Gordon out of his rut of mental depression.

He was tactful enough not to refer to the past or present conditions of Gordon's life.

"There is a splendid show at one of the theaters to-night," he said to Phil in the course of their conversation after lunch one day. "I know you would enjoy it, old man. Suppose you come with me. Of course, I expect you to take dinner at my house."

"Thanks for the invitation," replied Gordon, sincerely grateful. "But I am afraid I won't be able to go this time."

"Why not?" inquired the other.

"Because I am needed at home. My two children would miss me if I failed to come home at the usual hour," said Phil with a blush and a sigh. "I don't like to disappoint them."

Gordon's friend did not seem inclined to accept this excuse.

"Say," he laughed, "I am a married man myself and I have two youngsters I think a whole lot of. But I don't intend to spoil them. They appreciate you more if you neglect them a bit now and then.

"Besides, a good clean show with a lot of comedy is a tonic for a man. You better come with me, Phil. It will do you a world of good. It is just the thing you need right now, old man. So you better come with me."

They argued back and forth for some little time, and finally Gordon agreed to go to the show.

He called up his home and talked to both of his children. Then he gave some instructions to Annie and hung up, relieved.

Late that afternoon as he prepared to leave his office, one of his business associates came in unexpectedly for a conference.

He was a man of great influence and high financial standing, who could not be turned away with a few words.

Gordon saw at once that he would not be able to keep the dinner engagement with his college chum. So he got him on the phone and agreed to meet him in the lobby of the theater at eight o'clock.

"I'll manage to get a bite in a down-town restaurant," he told him. Sorry to miss the dinner, old man."

The conference did not last nearly as long as he expected, and he might have gone to his friend's home for dinner. But since he had canceled this he decided to eat somewhere else.

There were a number of fashionable restaurants in the heart of the city, and after some deliberation he selected the one he had visited many times before he be-

came a benedict.

He had nearly two hours to himself. Since this was to be an evening of enjoyment, he intended to get the most out of it.

Strains of soft music greeted him as he entered. A polite waiter ushered him to a table which stood in a little alcove and almost hidden by gigantic palms and other plants.

Phil smiled to himself as he sat down and glanced about.

It was a reminiscent smile, for the scenes about him were a reminder of the happy days when he was a suitor for the lovely Marie Carey's hand. In this very dining room they had planned their future.

But he did not allow his mind to ramble on and stumble across unpleasant memories. All about him were happy faces, brilliant gowns worn by beautiful women, and eager escorts.

The dinner was splendid and the music enchanting. But a feeling of melancholy crept over him. Longing for the one woman dominated him.

"Marie—Marie!" his sorrowful heart cried out. "Where are you?"

And then, in the midst of momentary unhappy reflections, he heard a voice that was very familiar. It was a woman's voice.

At a table in the little alcove next to his, a couple was being seated. Gordon could not see their faces because of the plants between them.

By dodging and ducking he managed to get a glimpse of the woman's face.

"Mrs. Hendricks," he murmured. "I thought so."

But there was more food for thought. The man with Mrs. Hendricks was not her husband. Gordon could tell that instantly. His curiosity being aroused to

no small degree, he stole another glimpse.

Suddenly he started.

His features turned to stone and a fire began to smolder in his eyes. The man with Mrs. Hendricks was Harold Wayne.

Instantly he was on the alert. His hands strayed over the table and clutched one of the silver knives.

Not that he intended to make use of it, for he needed no weapon to punish this cad and near-murderer. So Wayne had found a new mistress in Mrs. Hendricks.

Phil's thoughts wandered back to the night he had found Alice and this man together in the pavillion.

They rushed again to the scene on the roadside, where during that fierce fight Wayne shot him.

But Gordon had taken too much for granted. This he realized as he studied the features of the man with Mrs. Hendricks.

A remark made by the latter, which Phil heard distinctly, informed him that he had been mistaken. This man was not Harold, but his cousin, Walter Wayne.

Disappointed and glad both, Gordon decided to pay no further attention to the couple.

It did not concern him in the least whom Mrs. Hendricks had chosen for a lover, for she was known for her moral laxity.

Then he heard something that instantly put him on the alert once more.

"By the way, Walter," Mrs. Hendricks was saying, "what become of your dear cousin, Harold? He disappeared quite suddenly and I have heard nothing about him since."

"You know why he left this part of the country, don't you?" her companion inquired.

"No, I don't," the woman replied innocently.

"Oh, quit your kidding," Walter grinned. "The

last time I saw him he told me that he knew you very well. In fact he intimated that you two were old friends."

"He did, did he?" Mrs. Hendricks smiled reminiscently. "I hope he did not lead you to believe that we were anything but friends."

"No, that was not necessary, my dear," came back meaningly. "I am very good at reading between the lines. Harold is not the kind of a chap to interest himself in married women unless——"

"The wrong conclusion, Walter," the woman interrupted. "I suppose I'll have to explain in detail in order to change your opinion in this matter. I met Harold Wayne through Mrs. Gordon. You heard of her, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," the latter nodded. "Who hasn't heard about Alice Gordon."

Phil, already having become intensely interested in the conversation that was being carried on within his hearing, sat rooted to his chair.

He despised deliberate eavesdropping, but a sudden determination gripped him. He wanted to hear what others thought of the woman he called his wife.

And poor Phil was destined to get an earful.

"You know that the second Gordon marriage was a complete fizzle," Mrs. Hendricks spoke again. "Alice and her husband could not agree at all.

"I can't blame Phil, though, for he always was the finest kind of a chap. Well, when she began flirting with other men, the trouble started.

"Your dear cousin Harold," she went on, leaning forward, "had quite a crush on Alice. They were caught together and Alice received orders to leave. Quite by accident I met her in the city.

"I did not have to coax her much to tell me what

was wrong. She told me the whole story, and I asked her to stay at my house until the matter was settled either one way or another.

"She made no secret of the fact that she had an affair with Harold Wayne. In fact she seemed to enjoy talking about it.

"She led me to believe that Harold intended to marry her as soon as Gordon got a divorce. But something went amiss.

"Alice never saw her prospective second husband again. Well, I need not tell you why he disappeared. He just about killed Phil Gordon. Alice was in a rage when he left without saying goodby to her.

"Well," Mrs. Hendricks continued with a grin, "Alice did not seem to enjoy being left out in the cold entirely. She flirted outrageously with some of my men friends. She went out with several of them.

"She was bound to get in bad, and that is just what happened. She and I had a fuss, and she left. Later I heard that she had written a letter to her father, asking him to intercede for her with Phil. She is back again now at Oak Manor, and I am told that she is having quite a gay time of it.

"Oh, she is a shrewd one," was the conclusion. "And you can bet that she'll never leave home again unless she is carried away. But I feel sorry for poor Phil Gordon. He must be blind not to see through his wife's tricks."

It took every ounce of Gordon's willpower to hold himself under control. But his rage found no outlet because he dare not make his presence known.

And even had he been in a position to do so, what would it avail him? He had simply listened to the ugly truth about his wife.

But what nearly drove him frantic was the reali-

zation that Alice's improper conduct had become public property.

She was being talked about in restaurants, and no doubt in other places where society folk gathered.

In the meantime the couple on the other side of the palms had renewed the conversation with Alice again as the main topic.

Walter Wayne explained that he had assisted his cousin when the latter fled, believing that he had killed Gordon.

He said that there had been a hasty agreement between them with the result that he was to manage the estate adjoining that of the Gordons.

And while he continued to listen, Phil heard some more scandalous news about his wife. Finally he could not stand it any longer. He rose quickly and left the restaurant.

"By God, I'll settle with her this very night!" he muttered fiercely as he stepped to the curb and hailed a taxi. "That woman has made me the laughing stock of Chicago. She must leave my house. If she won't agree to a divorce I'll—I'll——" he did not finish the last sentence.

But just as he boarded the taxi that was to take him to Oak Manor, he remembered that he had an engagement to go to the theater. Hurriedly he consulted his watch.

It was a few minutes past seven. How could he enjoy a show in his present state of mind? He felt quite sure that he would be able to reach his friend at home if he called up his home at once.

At the next corner he asked the taxi driver to stop for a moment.

From a drugstore he delivered the message that freed him for the evening, although he had to resort to

an untruth.

"Now drive like hell!" he said to the chauffeur as he climbed back into the vehicle. "I want to get home as fast as I can. If you make it in an hour I'll give you an extra ten dollar bill."

When the taxi driver heard the words, he made up his mind to capture the ten dollar bill.

Chapter 163

TALBOT'S VISITOR.

THE EVIDENCE against Victor Talbot was piling up. Those familiar with the circumstances surrounding the case frankly declared that the accused man would be convicted of first degree murder at the coming trial. The fact that he had been indicted so quickly by a special jury seemed to indicate that his guilt was unquestioned.

Cut off from the outside world, Talbot sat in his cell, racking his brain to find an avenue of escape.

But there was none because he was unable to show where he had been on the night of Roger Hawkins' murder.

Another thing, he could not explain why his rifle had disappeared from the gun case to be found later lying beside the murdered man.

This was perhaps the most damning bit of evidence. No matter which way he turned in his desperate effort to solve the mystery, the way was barred.

What hurt him most, however, was the fact that since his arrest the girl he loved so dearly had made no attempt to see him.

Ah, how he longed for a glimpse of her sweet young face, a smile and a few words of comfort.

But that was denied him, and he tried to get what comfort he could out of his unshaken belief that Lillian Crawford was being kept away by her stepmother, and that her loyalty to him could not be killed.

Had she not told him in the hour of his arrest that nothing could part them—not even death?

So the days dragged on wearily with no ray of sunshine to cheer him. The future looked ominously dark, and it became a hard task to keep the already flickering flame of hope alive.

In the meantime the newspaper continued to make the most of the Hawkins' murder case.

And no one read every line with keener interest than did Mrs. Crawford.

Now that Lillian had been removed from the scene, she was determined to do all in her power to save Victor Talbot from the hangman's noose and thus win his gratitude and eventually, his love.

She formed and rejected a number of plans before she finally found one which would give her the best chance. And when she adopted this one, she at once took the necessary steps to put it into execution.

As it happend, Judge Lindsay, in whose court the murder case had to be tried, was an old friend of the family. Before the death of Mr. Crawford, these two had been on the most intimate terms. And afterward the judge had become an ardent admirer of the prepossessing widow.

Quite naturally Mrs. Crawford hoped to make good use of the judge. Her first step was to get in personal touch with him for no other purpose than that of gaining his approval and help.

Dressing in the most becoming fashion, she called upon the jurist.

When Mrs. Crawford was announced to Judge Lindsay, the latter had just concluded an examination and had ordered Victor Talbot taken back to his cell.

As always Talbot had stood firm. He had insisted that he had not the slightest connection with the murder or Roger Hawkins, and he was as innocent of his death as the judge himself

As he rose from the bench to greet his visitor, there was a certain irritation visible in the judge's countenance caused by the steady and repeated denial of the accused.

Mrs. Crawford did not mince matters and proceeded at once to the object of her visit.

"I have no doubt," she began, "that you know of the effect on my poor daughter of the scandal that the accusation against Mr. Talbot has brought upon her.

"In order to change her thoughts, I have sent her south as I fear her malady would become more serious if she remained here and was daily reminded of this unfortunate affair.

"It is of the utmost importance to me," she continued, "as well as it is in the interest of justice to get at the truth in this mysterious case.

"I am firmly convinced that in an interview with Mr .Talbot, I could induce him to confess, if I could make him realize Lillian's sad state. Will you enable me to do this?

"Will your Honor grant me an opportunity to speak to him? I give you my sacred word that no one shall ever hear of it. Do not forget what a public service it would be if I brought him to a confession."

The judge looked down in thought.

"At all events, Mrs. Crawford," he conceded, "your idea is well worth consideration, for after all, our examinations have not progressed this case one step. The prisoner persists in his denial of having met the murdered man again after leaving your house that night.

"But, do not over-rate your influence, Mrs. Crawford?" he added. "Do you think he would jeopardize his life by a confession to you? What he will say to you, naturally I or some other official who will be present will hear and——"

"Oh, no," interrupted Mrs. Crawford. "Your Honor misunderstands me. There should not be a third person at our interview. Only then can we expect that he will speak out. He must be led to believe that I have come only on account of my daughter.

"I, as a woman, should be able to penetrate his defenses and touch his heart better than you or the district attorney when he stands before you and answers you in your official capacity. But if you or anyone else should be present, I very much doubt that I will succeed."

"That cannot be," replied the judge. "It is quite impossible. I could not grant an interview except in the presence of witnesses. If it became known that I allowed you to go to the accused alone, the consequences for me might be very serious."

"But your honor, it would never be known except if Mr. Talbot was really guilty and confessed to me. Only then would it become known that I had an interview with him," rejoined Mrs. Crawford. "And such a result could not but rebound to your credit.

"If you refuse me permission to see him," she went on earnestly, "the mystery in which you are groping may perhaps never be solved. But if you give me the permission and he confesses, you may perhaps be criticized for your action, but the credit of having cleared up the crime will be much greater than any damage that such criticism may do you.

"On the other hand, if he does not confess, this interview will remain a secret between yourself and me, for neither of us will have any reason to let it become known."

Judge Lindsay still hesitated to grant her the desired permission, but in the end, Mrs. Crawford's handsome pleading eyes bore off the victory and he consented.

They selected the evening for the time of her

visit.

Victor Talbot sat at his table. He had been writing. A guard came to the door of his cell and told him that a lady had come to see him.

"A lady?" Talbot jumped up.

It could be only one—his Lillian. Good God, was he to have the joy of seeing his loved one? With wildly beating heart he awaited her coming.

The barred door opened and a darkly clothed, veiled woman appeared.

Grievously disappointed, Victor fell back. This imposing figure was not that of Lillian. It was another who stood before him. But who was she, and what did she want?

His features, white with prison pallor, showed only too plainly his keen disappointment. With a quick motion, Mrs. Crawford threw back her veil.

"Ah, is it you?" murmured Talbot, unconsciously retreating still further. But in a moment he had collected himself and approached her. "Have you come to tell me of Lillian? Oh, be merciful! tell me how the poor child is. How is she bearing this misfortune?"

The brilliancy of Mrs. Crawford's eyes faded away, and for a moment she bit her lips uneasily. How she loved this man!

The mere sight of him was sufficient to quicken her pulse and he—he spoke of Lillian! Her lips formed themselves into a contemptuous sneer.

"You take the little girl too seriously," she said slowly. "At first Lillian was sincerely grieved, but she has consoled herself rather quickly. She received an invitation from some friends in the south to visit them and she accepted gladly for, as she said herself, she needs diversion."

The lying woman paused a moment, then added:

"She seems to be enjoying herself down there; at least there is nothing in her letters which would show that she was worrying the least."

"That is false—it cannot be true!" broke in Victor Talbot.

"You do not believe me?" Mrs. Crawford cried, "you mean to say that I lie? I rather expected this and have brought one of her letters to prove to you what I have just said. Here, read and judge for yourself!"

With an offended air, she handed him a sheet which she took out of her purse. Victor took it eagerly. At a glance, he had to admit to himself that the writing was Lillian's.

He read:

Dear Mother:

Please send me some more of my things, especially my blue silk dress with the white lace. I need a great many dresses here as Alice Wentworth and I are constantly invited out.

I cannot tell you how beautiful it is here, there are so many things to see. Alice's father is so nice, and her brother Guy is still more so. Alice says her brother Guy is in love with me, but I wish to hear nothing more about love after this.

Has Mr. Talbot finally confessed? In any case I do not want to come home until this terrible affair is over and forgotten. Even here they speak about the case and all the papers are full of it.

My name does not appear and I am glad of it, if only for the sake of the Wentworths. Oh, how quickly I have been cured of this foolish infatua-

tion.

Do not forget to send me my ivory lace fan. Next week the Wentworths are giving a ball in my honor. Guy is to lead the cotillion with me. He is the most dashing creature I have ever seen. Would you not like to come down here too?

Your affectionate daughter,

LILLIAN."

Again and again Victor read and reread these lines. Could his Lillian really have written them? No, it was unthinkable?

The earnest, seriously inclined girl could not have suddenly become so giddy, so frivolous, and have forgotten him.

It was nonsense to think so, but he felt as though he were being choked by unseen hands.

"What do you say now?" rang Mrs. Crawford's triumphant voice into his ears. "It is terrible to think how we can misplace our confidence, but I knew how it would be. You were the first man who courted the vain child.

"She was flattered and thought herself in love with you, but coming out into the world in other scenes and among other people, she sees that her feelings toward you were nothing but silly infatuation.

"How could an experienced man like yourself lose his heart to such a child who could not understand you. No impartial person could have foreseen a different end, and that is why I was opposed from the beginning."

Talbot stared at her absent-mindedly, as though

he did not understand what he had heard her say.

"Lillian never wrote this letter," he cried, throwing the sheet on the table.

Mrs. Crawford colored darkly, her eyes glowed with hate.

"Indeed?" she said. "You will not believe what she herself has written? I am really touched by your constancy. It is a pity that you get so little thanks for it. In a short time, perhaps, you will be cured of your unbelief when you hear of her engagement to Guy Wentworth."

She spoke convincingly. A cold shudder passed over him. He could bear anything but the loss of Lillian's love.

And still, she was but a child after all, and had seen nothing of the world. Was it possible that her senses were intoxicated with its pleasures?

As a young fellow, had he, too, not been carried away by them? But no, no! She could not speak so heartlessly of him. She, who had said to him, "You are my world!" It could not be.

"Victor," said Mrs. Crawford in a soft, ingratiating voice. "Do not be downcast by this. Lillian was never worthy of your love. How can you cling so to this fickle, immature creature, when you can find the truest and best affection?

"Does not my presence here prove to you my good will? I defy the whole world and come to you here to say, 'give me your hand and I will create a new happiness for you.' I have but to say a word, and you are free!"

He looked at her amazed. What had she said? She would free him—release him—clear him of this disgrace? It was salvation!

It would remove the weight which crushed him

here in this narrow cell.

Once more he could go out into the woods which were his home. Only there could he breathe freely again.

Like a drowning man grasping a helping hand outstretched to save him, Victor impetuously took Mrs Crawford's hand and his burning eyes looked deep into hers.

"Speak, tell me, how can you restore my honor and liberty?" he demanded hoarsely. "You surely know the guilty one. You know I am innocent and will bear witness for me?"

The woman shook her head.

"No, Victor, I do not know who is guilty, but I can free you." Her eyes glowed with repressed passion. She came close to him and said in a half whisper, "if you can establish an alibi, you are free."

She went on passionately:

"Now I will give you a proof of how great my love is for you. I will testify that at the time when Mr. Northup was shot you were with me in the pavillion, that we had a rendezvous.

"Everyone will understand that you would rather die than speak of this, that you would protect at any cost the honor of the woman who was with you. Do you doubt for a moment that my testimony will squash the case against you?"

Talbot heard her in blank astonishment.

The blood rushed hotly to his head. What love was hers, that she was prepared to sacrifice her honor to save him!

He was stunned by the magnitude of her proposed sacrifice, but he stood up and said resolutely:

"I thank you, Mrs. Crawford. I realize fully how good your intentions are, but nevertheless I will not al-

low you to sacrifice yourself for me."

"Victor, do not drive me to despair!" she cried. "You are deserted by God and the whole world, and if I do not take this step for you, you are lost! The time is flying and I must leave you soon.

"I will not be able to get access to you again. Have pity, do not make me more unhappy than I am. Oh, how I suffer for you!"

Gravely, he shook his head.

"I cannot, I cannot Mrs. Crawford. I cannot consent to owe my life to a falsehood," he groaned. "And moreover, even if I were weak enough to succumb to this temptation, I could never reward your sacrifice in the measure you expect of me.

"You could not fail to be disappointed. I thank you from my heart for your good will, but I cannot accept your offer."

Mrs. Crawford was staggered.

She had expended all her thought and cleverness on this plan; she had been sure that this proof of her love—the greatness of her sacrifice—would bring him to her feet.

In the pride of her confidence, she had come here sure of her victory.

She had brought with her documentary proof of Lillian's unfaithfulness, and had shown herself in contrast and had cried:

"I am doing all this for you; I sacrifice to you my pride and my honor to save your life and liberty!"

But he had rejected all—he was too proud and too honorable to permit this sacrifice. He preferred to die rather than to save himself by falsehood.

In her terrible disappointment, she could have raved; and the shock was so great that almost fainting, she fell on the cot in the cell.

Talbot came to her. He had hated her as evil is hated. She had been cruel to Lillian, but now he was sorry for her. How she must love him!

What man, in the face of such love, could remain untouched?

"Mrs. Crawford," he begged, "compose yourself. When you are more calm, you will realize yourself that it is impossible for me to accept your sacrifice. It would be very unscrupulous on my part were I to do so.

"It is true," he continued, his voice husky, "my trouble is hard to bear, but I live in the trust and hope that an almighty, righteous power will yet reveal my innocence to the world."

The woman held up both of her hands in an attitude of desperate pleading. With tears in her eyes she said:

"While you are waiting in hope, you will be utterly ruined. Oh, Victor, listen to reason. How easy it would be for me to give my testimony in your behalf! What need we care for the world. We can turn our backs to it and go away where we are unknown and live for ourselves and our happiness alone."

Talbot said nothing. He knew not what to say.

Mrs. Crawford sobbed in despair. Her spirit was broken. She would have been happier if she were only the slave of this man.

There was a sound at the door. With a little cry, Mrs. Crawford started up. She knew it was the signal for her to go.

She looked about hopelessly and helplessly. Were all her efforts to be in vain?

"My God, my God," she groaned, "what shall I do? Shall I leave you to your fate and mourn over you? Oh, Victor, how can you be so cruel? Will you let me do nothing for you?"

Gloomily, he shook his head.

"No one but God can help me," he replied firmly, "and I feel He will not fail me. Take my thanks for your sympathy, Mrs. Crawford, I will never forget this hour."

Eagerly she took the hand he held out. She could not look in his face for fear of breaking down totally.

"Farewell," she said faintly, "do not forget, you will always find me ready to do what I have offered, if you should later decide to grant my wish, and I pray that you may change your mind before it is too late."

The guard was at the door and warned her that it was time to leave.

With a supreme effort, she braced herself to go. His last words still rang in her ears. She could say no more, for she was struggling with sobs and tears.

Bowed in despair, she staggered out.

Talbot stood motionless for a time on the spot where she had left him, and his eyes fell to the ground. Was it a dream or a reality?

Where was Lillian's incomprehensible letter? The sheet had disappeared from the table as though Mrs. Crawford had taken it again. With a gasp, he sat down on the prison bench.

But one thought occupied him. Could Lillian have written that letter? He had known her so intimately. Could he have been so terribly mistaken in her?

Sooner would he have lost faith in God than faith in her! No, it was simply impossible. He could not tell how the letter had been written, but he was certain that she had never written it.

The more he considered, the clearer it became to him that Mrs. Crawford had expected to win him this day.

Though he had been moved by her offer to immo-

late herself for him, he now began to doubt the motives for this magnanimity.

Never, he felt, could this woman draw him to herself.

Her beauty left him absolutely cold; nor could he forget her enmity toward him during his courtship of Lillian.

How strange that this woman should love him so passionately! Now that she was gone his doubts became greater and greater.

He longed for the truth about Lillian. How she must have tortured the poor child.

Gradually the image of Mrs. Crawford faded from his mind and his longing for Lillian awoke with renewed intensity.

His faith in her was only strengthened. She would be his hope in all his trials, for, without her love, life itself was not worth possessing.

Stealthily he took a little picture from his pocket which he had managed to secrete on himself when he was taken to prison. It was Lillian's, and lovingly his eyes rested on her dear face.

"My sweetheart," he murmured softly. "If I lose you I will die!"

Chapter 164

"GET OUT!"

PHILIP GORDON was speeding homeward, a very much disappointed and a greatly distressed man. Fierce anger was his, too, for he had virtually been forced to listen to an ugly truth about the woman who bore his name. Alice had deliberately soiled the family honor. She was being discussed only in public places, and there was no telling where it would end.

If an old friend like Mrs. Hendricks saw fit to throw mud at Alice, what would their enemies do?

Of course, Phil was not aware of the fact that Mrs. Hendricks and his second wife had quarreled. Neither did he suspect the truth about the more intimate relations between these two women.

But there was not time for such conjectures now. The thought uppermost in his mind was a complete reckoning with Alice.

She must not be permitted to continue as the mistress of his home.

Unless she would be able to explain certain things to his entire satisfaction, her stay at Oak Manor was bound to come to a sudden end.

It seemed that Philip Gordon was determined not to enjoy even a slight degree of mental tranquility for any length of time.

Since his marriage to Alice Procter, his life had been one bitter disappointment after another. How many heartaches had been his since the ill-advised union with that woman?

It has been said — and truthfully, that a man suffers most keen from the injuries he inflicts upon himself, either physically or mentally.

Gordon was fully conscious that no one but himself was directly responsible for his present misery. He had discarded his first wife whom he loved and worshipped, because of unreasonable jealousy.

Desponded over her loss, he allowed an experienced trickstress to hoodwink him.

As the taxi fairly flew along the country road, he set his teeth. In a few more minutes they would reach Oak Manor.

The driver was making good his promise of making the trip from Chicago in an hour.

Gordon noticed this as he consulted his watch. When the vehicle came to a stop in front of the great house, he jumped out and drew a roll of bills from his pocket.

While the fare amounted to four dollars, Phil gave the chauffeur a crisp new twenty dollar bill.

"Keep the change," he said, making an effort to be pleasant. "You did some fine driving, for you brought me home in less than hour."

The man touched his cap, pocketed the money gleefully, and departed.

As Gordon entered the house he met Annie in the hall.

"Where is my wife?" he inquired tersely.

"Upstairs in her boudoir," the girl answered, slanting a quick glance at Gordon's pale features. "I believe she is dressing to go out."

He nodded and hurried past Annie.

"I wonder what's up now?" the latter murmured as she looked after the master of the house. "If he means to start anything with Alice there'll be fur flying. She

has been raising cain with her maid nearly all evening and she is in an ugly mood."

Annie's prediction was bound to come true, for Phil Gordon was headed for his wife's boudoir with but one purpose in mind. The hour of a final reckoning had come.

As a rule he first ascertained whether Alice would see him before he entered. This consideration or formality he dispensed with now. He did not even knock on the door, but jerked it open and strode in with a dark scowl on his face.

Alice was seated before the dressing table scantily clad. Her maid had just put the finishing touches on her hair. When she saw Phil come in she did not seem pleased.

"Well?" she demanded without rising. "What's the idea?"

"I want to see you," he said curtly.

"Oh, do you?" Alice gave him a short glance over her shoulder. "Please be kind enough to stay out so I can get some clothes on. And the next time take the trouble of finding out first if I am ready to receive you, please."

That kind of a reception was hardly calculated to soothe Gordon's already ruffled feelings. He did not move.

"I haven't time to talk to you," Alice spoke again in a tone of anger when she saw her husband's obvious disinclination to comply with her request. "Can't you see that I am dressing to go out?"

"Yes, I can see that," Phil returned. "But before you go I have something to say to you."

Again his wife gave him a sharp glance.

"I haven't time to listen to you, old dear," she said, trying to smile. "Now run along. Whatever is on

your mind will keep until to-morrow."

Gordon's patience was giving out fast.

It provoked him to see his wife's maid standing there with an impudent grin on her face. Hot anger swept over him when the girl deliberately turned her back on him and busied herself anew with Alice's hair.

He dreaded to quarrel with his wife in the presence of servants.

With a few steps he put himself directly between Alice and the dressing table.

"Ask that maid of yours to leave the room at once!" he commanded sternly. "If you don't, I will."

Alice jumped to her feet.

But the words already on her lips did not find utterance. During the few seconds she studied her husband's features she saw that he was in no mood to be trifled with.

"Leave us alone," she said to her maid. "I'll ring when I want you."

As soon as the door closed behind the girl, husband and wife confronted one another in open hostility. Anger and resentment flashed up in Alice's eyes.

Phil was so wrought up that his voice failed him when he tried to speak.

"Well?" she shot at him, impatient. "Now that we are alone, speak. But I hope you are gentleman enough to apologize first for your——"

Phil silenced her with a quick gesture of contempt.

"Apologize to you?" he cried. "Apologize to a woman whose escapades have made her notorious; who is being talked about in restaurants, clubs and other public places? Why, I have more respect for the ignorant wench who just left this room than I have for you."

Alice turned pale. Even her lips lost their color.

"Did you come home to insult me?" she retorted, furious.

"Insult you?" Gordon burst into a laugh that was hideous. "It is impossible to insult a woman like you. I thought I knew you pretty well, but I never dreamed that you could be capable of some of the things attributed to you by outsiders. What I heard shocked me."

"What do you mean?" his wife exclaimed. "Who are those outsiders you heard talking about me?"

Phil shrugged his shoulders.

"I might give you their names," he snorted, "but I won't. You might go to the extreme of demanding that these things be proven by the people who said them. You are fool enough to start a suit for slander, with the inevitable result of hearing the shameful truth revealed in a court of justice. That must be prevented by all means."

While Gordon paused to get a more secure grip on his slipping self-control his wife stood glaring at him with dilating eyes.

"You might at least repeat what was said about me," she cried. "I know it can be nothing but a batch of lies, just the same I am anxious to hear them."

"Indeed, you shall hear them," he told her, suddenly becoming ominously quiet.

And in a voice sometimes low with pain, and then shrill with wrath, he repeated the conversation he had listened to at the restaurant almost word for word.

"Now then," he went on, his fury blazing into a towering flame. "I suppose you will deny that you planned to elope with Harold Wayne after he shot me. You will also deny your stay at the home of Mrs. Hendricks and your abominable conduct there.

"The pitiful letter to your father was inspired by

your desire to come back here. You told him that you would bring Betty home if he interceded for you.

"And, I, like a fool, consented to let Miss Desmond go because you demanded it. I deprived my children and myself of the services of this splendid woman, the hem of whose dress you are not fit to kiss."

As he paused Alice took quick advantage of the opening given her by mentioning Miss Desmond.

"Oh, that is where the shoe pinches!" she sneered. "It hurt you to let her go. I always though you were in love with her. But now, since you have a crazy idea that this Miss Desmond was your first wife in disguise, I suppose you'll go after her."

"I am going after her," Phil replied hotly. "I have a detective agency trailing her now."

"Indeed!" Alice reached for her powder puff lying on the dressing table and began daubing her face. "Well, I am not very much interested in that. But I will be if the return of that woman threatens my welfare and position. Don't think for a moment that I will ever tolerate her again in this house."

Gordon stood dumbfounded.

He had come with the avowed purpose of telling Alice that she must leave Oak Manor, and she had the nerve to lay down the law to him.

"It is not a question of you tolerating her," he said, his cheeks burning. "The question now is how long it will take you to pack your things and go."

She gave him a long impudent stare.

"I, go?" she laughed. "Why nothing could be further from my mind. If you think for a moment that I will leave Oak Manor to make room for that woman, you better guess again."

"This is not guess work on my part," he shot back. "You are not a fit person to preside over my household.

I am telling you to pack your belongings and get out!"

Alice was powdering her face again. She smiled coolly as she said:

"I flatly refuse to leave, dear husband of mine. If you want to institute divorce proceedings on what grounds you have, go ahead. But I'll fight to the finish. And unless I am much mistaken, you'll regret it before we are half through."

Phil saw that he was baffled.

He knew he could not use physical force to make the woman vacate the premises. He knew also that it was worse than foolish to prolong the argument.

So far as instituting divorce proceedings were concerned, it would create no end of gossip and merriment with the defendant still living under his roof.

"I wish you'd be kind enough to go now," his wife urged in a mocking tone. "I must finish dressing for I have a very important social engagement to might. You don't want me to come home late, do you?"

With slow, measured steps Gordon walked to the door. Never in his life had he felt so desperate. Never had he been defied with more impudence.

"Before I go," he said, whirling around suddenly, "I want to tell you this: if you do not pack everything that belong to you, and get out of my house within the next twenty-four hours, I'll have the servants do your packing and escort you as far as the road. Now this is absolutely final."

As he left the boudoir Alice's derisive laughter followed him. Fiercely determined to make good his ultimatum, he went downstairs.

He had hardly been seated in the library when the telephone rang.

It startled him out of his mental stupor.

Continued in next number

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